

MEMORIAL

OF A

Committee of the Citizens of Charleston, South Carolina,

AGAINST THE

Proposed Increase of the Tariff.

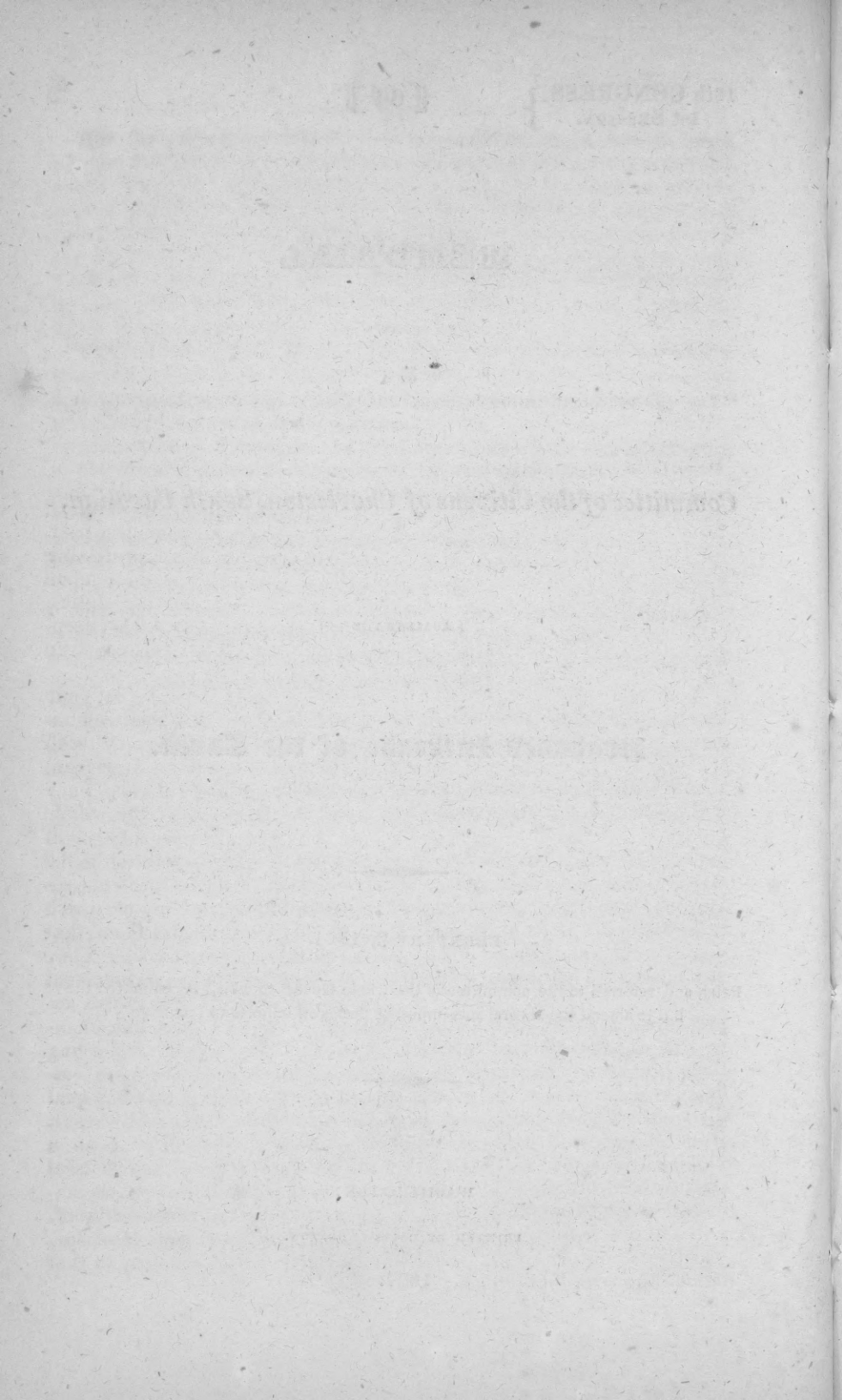
FEBRUARY 9, 1824.

Read, and referred to the committee of the whole House to which is committed the bill to amend the several acts imposing duties on imports and tonnage.

WASHINGTON:

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1824.



MEMORIAL.

The memorial of the citizens of Charleston and its vicinity, by their Committee,

RESPECTFULLY SHEWETH:

That your memorialists have not witnessed, without the liveliest anxiety and alarm, the efforts that have been made, for sometime past, and are still pertinaciously persisted in, by certain persons, professing themselves the exclusive friends of domestic industry, to force upon the good people of the United States a system of protecting duties, which, your memorialists do seriously believe, is calculated most deeply to affect the great interests of the agricultural states; perhaps even to work their speedy and utter ruin.

Your memorialists did, upon a former occasion, apply to your honorable body upon this very subject, and they trust that their remonstrance was then marked with all that calmness and decency with which it is fit that citizens, under such a Government as the American, should address themselves to their representatives and rulers. They are persuaded that they took a full and candid view of the whole question, whether it be regarded as one of theoretical curiosity, or of great practical moment—whether it be considered in relation to the whole Union or to their own peculiar situation. Upon a solemn review of these their reasonings and representations, (a copy of which is herewith respectfully transmitted) they see nothing in them that ought to be retracted, or even in the slightest degree qualified. They still maintain, that a system of monopoly and bounties is inconsistent with every idea of equal rights and sound policy. They still deprecate so violent a diversion of capital and industry from the channels in which they would naturally flow, for the purpose of forcing them into others, in which their operations must needs be more embarrassed and less efficient. They still protest against that unequal distribution of the public burthens, which must necessarily result from the imposing such heavy indirect taxes upon consumption, as a violation of the *spirit* at least, if not of the very *letter* of the federal constitution. They still think it probable, that the failure of the national revenue from the customs, in consequence of the proposed tariff, will make a resort to direct taxation inevitable, and they look forward with concern to the troubles and inconveniences incident to that odious and vexatious system.

But the objections which your memorialists have *now* to urge against the adoption of the measure in question, are not these *general ones*. They do not imply a refined discussion of any abstract principles of political economy. They do not involve any complicated calculations of political arithmetic. Unfortunately for the people of the Southern states, they are of a very obvious and palpable kind. They arise immediately out of the situation of this part of the country, and come home with a force, greater than that of any argument, to the business and bosoms of all its inhabitants.

The change that has taken place in the circumstances of this state, since the former memorial was transmitted to Congress, is unprecedented and inconceivable. At that time (and it is no longer ago than three years) South Carolina was enjoying advantages, as an agricultural state, that have seldom if ever been exceeded in any other part of the world. Her staple commodities were sent to a ready market, and commanded prices that shewed she shared in a sort of monopoly of it. Thin as her population is, (not above twenty inhabitants to the square mile) the value of lands every where rose considerably. On the sea islands in particular, to eight, ten, and even twenty times as much as they were rated at thirty years ago, while that of slaves and other property also greatly advanced. The citizens of this state might then contemplate a measure like that in question, if not without disapprobation, at least without dismay, and although they did protest, as they had a right to protest, against an impolitic and premature encouragement of manufactures, in a country like the United States, where there is so much good land unoccupied and in woods, and against the injustice of taxing so heavily almost all the classes of the community, and almost all the states of the confederation, to fill the pockets of comparatively few speculators and monopolists; yet, as they did not perceive, at that time, the pernicious tendency of the measure in its *whole extent*, they would probably have acquiesced under it, had it been adopted, without much murmuring—certainly without any open and violent resistance. But things are now in a very different situation with them, and the whole subject has assumed a more serious and gloomy aspect. The cultivation of cotton, encouraged by the very prosperity which has been just noticed, has been so prodigiously extended in this and other states, as well as in foreign countries, that, notwithstanding the unprecedented increase of the trade in England, every market in Europe is already glutted with it; and as the evil is every day growing with the growth of the new countries into which enterprise is pushing its adventures, there can be no doubt but that, in the course of a very few years, this commodity will, like all others, where there is a free competition in trade, be reduced to the *lowest possible price*. In the mean time, the effects that have already been produced here, by this mighty revolution, are deplorable in the extreme. Property of all kinds is depreciated beyond example. A feeling of gloomy despondence is beginning to prevail every where in the lower country. Estates are sacrificed to pay the *las* instalments on the bonds given for the purchase money. Nobody

seems disposed to buy, what every body is anxious to sell, at any price. In short, it is manifest that the extraordinary prosperity which South Carolina, in common with the other Southern states, enjoyed some years ago, is gone by forever, and it will require all the skill and industry of our agriculturists, in future, to maintain their place in the market, *even at the most reduced prices of produce.*

And is this juncture, your memorialists beg leave to ask, is this juncture, so critical and perilous at best, a seasonable one for the measure in question? Is it at this moment, when the cotton trade upon which, not the *prosperity* alone, but the *very existence*, of some parts of the Southern states depends, is sinking under its own weight; when an American statesman ought to be tasking his invention for expedients, to protect and preserve that very lucrative portion of it, which is at present enjoyed by the United States—is it at such a moment as this, that we are seriously discussing a measure like the tariff bill? When the people of the South are already apprehending the exclusion of their produce from foreign markets, by a fair competition, or by the partialities of the European colonial systems, shall we provoke our present customers to measures of retaliation, by ceasing to be *their* customers? Is it wise and politic to try experiments on such a vast scale? Is it prudent to hazard so much *real and present* good for the attainment of so *little*, and that, too, existing in mere vision and possibility?

Such is the language which your memorialists think ought to be addressed, and which they cannot but flatter themselves will be addressed with effect, to the wisdom and patriotism of your honorable body; but, the occasion is, in their opinion, so momentous and alarming, that they feel themselves warranted in declaring, as they now do, in the most emphatic manner, that they regard such a measure as the one under consideration, (*if their view of its nature and probable consequences is correct,*) as a violation of the spirit of the federal compact. Your memorialists would remind the advocates of the tariff, that there is a wide difference between a confederacy of independent sovereignties or states, and a nation living under a *single and consolidated government*. The relation of the parts to each other is much more intimate in the *latter*, than they can ever be in the *former* case, and as the interest of each individual part is, *there*, supposed to be identified completely with that of the whole, so it is generally understood that, whenever occasion may require it, great national objects must be promoted, whatever partial evils may be occasioned by the measures adopted for that purpose. But in a confederacy, although the states are united for certain purposes, yet, as to all others, they continue distinct and independent, and have, therefore, distinct and separate interests, and it is not possible to conceive any situation, in which one member of such a political union can be required to sacrifice itself, in order to promote the welfare or even to secure the existence of the rest. In a consolidated and single empire, if it were necessary to lay waste a whole tract of country and to keep

it, for ever so long a time, desolate and in ruins, for the purpose of preventing the incursions of a foreign foe upon the rest of it, there can be no doubt that the individuals inhabiting that tract of country would be obliged to submit to the inconvenience, because requisite for the safety of the whole society of which they would be members, and because their interests as individuals, are supposed to be swallowed up and lost in their interests as citizens. But, in a confederacy, no such case as this could possibly arise, from the very fact, that it was a confederacy, and the giving up of a whole state, as in the case supposed, that is, not with a view to its ultimate interest, but professedly for the purpose of protecting the rest of the confederation as such, would be, as to it, a dissolution of the league.

Now, what is the fact here? We have united ourselves in a great National Government, which is indeed consolidated as to certain purposes, but is a mere league of independent states as to others. Congress has been invested with all the powers necessary to effect the former, and under what description of powers does that of protecting the manufactures of certain states, even at the risk of total ruin to others, come? It must be obvious to every one, that the right to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and the exclusive right to levy duties on exports and imports, were never given with any such view; and, although it is true, that the *words* in which these are delegated, are very large and sweeping, and therefore it would be difficult to say of such a measure as the one in contemplation, that it is absolutely *unconstitutional*, yet, your memorialists do affirm, that it is, nevertheless, inconsistent with the *character and spirit* of our confederated Government; and they, respectfully, but seriously and emphatically call upon you, to whom the conduct of that very complicated polity is committed, because of your wisdom and capacity, to reflect maturely upon the consequences that will probably ensue upon the adoption of the tariff proposed. They certainly deprecate any thing like a difference between the Government and the people; they abhor the idea of disunion; they conscientiously believe that that event would be an era of calamity, and downfall to the whole American family; but, it is for this very reason, that they reprobate measures which, for the mere shadow of some imaginary advantage to one or two districts of the country, for the mere private ends of some selfish individuals, expose the most important interests to the hazard of utter ruin; excite clamors and heart-burnings, perhaps open rebellion and sedition, among a people whose habits and inclinations are so peaceful and regular; and bring into jeopardy (for the fact cannot be disguised) a form of government under which the nation has hitherto prospered so much, and which, with moderate councils, might be handed down to a remote posterity; measures, in short, which most preposterously sacrifice the greater to the less, and ensure nothing but evils, much worse than any which they are intended to remove.

And when is it, that this pernicious measure is attempted to be forced upon the nation? At a period when its finances are in a condition, beyond all former example, prosperous and flourishing; when there is in the Treasury (without a tax) a clear surplus of nine millions; and when the people are yet expressing their wonder at the singular phenomenon of statesmen devising ways and means, not how to *raise*, but how to *get rid* of money.

There is, then, your memorialists beg leave to remark, no color or pretext to say that these additional duties are to be imposed with a view to *revenue*. The only object can be, to put the theory of some speculative politicians to the test of experiment.

This state has a yearly income of seven or eight millions of dollars, which will be hazarded by such an experiment, without the most distant hope or possibility of her deriving any advantage from it.

Now, it is against this desperate gambling, in which the immense stake is not taken out of the *gambler's* own pocket, but out of a *friend's*, that your memorialists do, in the name of the people of South Carolina, as well as of all the agricultural states, utterly protest.

WILLIAM DRAYTON,
HUGH S. LEGARE,
SAML. PRIOLEAU,
WILLIAM SEABROOK,

Committee of the Citizens.

